

AFGHANISTAN.

The character and importance of the information from Afghanistan and British India by the last arrivals from Europe give special interest and value to every thing calculated to throw light on the physical conformation and moral condition of the country of the late sudden and fearful disaster by which the British arms have been overwhelmed. We therefore extract from *Blackwood* for the present month that portion of the article on "Five Years in India, by H. G. Fane, Aide-de-Camp, &c.," which details the author's experiences in the Afghan country, as follows:

Lieutenant Fane made one of the memorable expeditions to Afghanistan under Sir John Keane, February 24th, 1839; the troops marched for the Bolan Pass. From Sirkarpur, they might fairly be said to have entered the enemy's country. Here Shah Sozib expressed a wish to see the cavalry. He came in a gilded litter, and expressed himself delighted at the condition of the horses, the size of the men, and their perfect discipline. One of his followers, as he turned away discontentedly, said, "Ah! the days of Mahomedanism are gone by. What a lord of the sword is every one of them!" The prince, of whom so much has been said, both good and bad, is a very fine, bearded, well-looking, handsome man; but is said to be too fond of fighting, though sufficiently severe in his government. We must have no scandal against crowned heads, and as the fighting rajah is always a blood-thirsty savage, we pay due respect to the man of peace.

The first portion of their route was over six-and-twenty miles of desert. This was evidently a difficult country, although the traps at this time were completely unmolested; their camels began to die in numbers, it was difficult to find food for their horses, and the supplies for their soldiers began to fall off in a formidable degree. At length the failure of supplies became so serious, that it was necessary to diminish the rations for both men and horses one-half. The march of armies in India is attended with circumstances curious to the human eye. A brigade of infantry was ordered to open the mounds up the hills. On the 2d day, when they were about to move, they were suddenly stopped—the palanquin-bearers had run away.

At length they came to the celebrated pass of Bolan. The entrance is grand, being between two masses of rock, about five hundred feet perpendicular, without a sign of vegetation, with a small river running under the one on the right, the road being merely the shingle. The width varied from seventy yards to five hundred. They found the camp pitched miles within the mountains. After a night of storm and rain, they moved thirteen miles further, still in these defiles. As they advanced, the ground became more difficult, and, though it was now the middle of March, when the sun is powerful in India, they found the weather unusually cold, the snow on the hill tops, and every appearance of severity of climate. Many of the baggage animals of the officers had, by this time, died, and the public camels were perishing by fifties. At length, however, towards the end of the month, they reached the valley of Shah, where the country began to improve, where they found forage for their cattle; but they had a heavy rain-storm in the evening, and before their arrival, a heavy snow-storm had fallen, which covered all the tents, and half-killed the miserable Hindooes. During all this time, the hill robbers, of which the mountains are full, were killing or stealing the cattle in all directions.

Their movement was now on Candahar, and they had to go through some terrible defiles still, in which they lost camels, horses, and baggage. Water was almost impossible to be had, and it was supposed that in this pass they would have been attacked by the Candahar robbers; but they happened to come two or three days sooner than they were expected. At length, about the middle of April, a mountain chief, called the Talyeran of the east, came to offer his allegiance, with two hundred horse, to the Shah. The heat now began to be intense, the thermometer standing at a hundred. They now met a messenger from Mr. Macnaghten (Sir William), to Sir John Keane, who brought a letter stating that the Candahar chief had abandoned the city. Candahar stands in a fine situation, in the centre of a valley formed by a very high range of mountains at the back, and two lower ranges on the opposite side; and the valley is well watered, and remarkably rich and beautiful. The scene must have offered a very striking contrast to the country through which they had just passed. As daylight broke, they found themselves in a land of cultivation and villages, Candahar itself standing near the northern side of the valley, under a range of high rocky mountains. It seemed a very large city surrounded with a good mud wall and ditch, over which the minarets and domes of the tomb of Ahmed Shah Dosh rose in the morning sun. The town was surrounded on all sides by walled fruit gardens filled with the mulberry, peach, nectarine and vine.

At length, the army being all rallied for action, the troops moved from Candahar, and on their way received a message from the chief of the Ghilzees, saying that he would not molest the British if they did not attack him, and if they gave him a considerable sum of money, he would protect their march; but Sir John Keane sent out a party to find out "where he was," and the protector made his escape in good time.

We then come to the storming of the famous fortress of Ghuznee. But there seems to have been, even in that brilliant instance, an extraordinary example of that deplorable want of foresight, or even common preparation, which explains the late disasters in Afghanistan. If we had not the direct testimony of this writer, who, from his situation, had every opportunity for knowing the fact, then the Indian army, advanced with Sir John Keane at its head, into the very heart of one of the most difficult countries of Asia, to attack one of its strongest fortresses, without heavy ordnance, and even without scaling ladders. The case is so unaccountable that we must give it in his own words:

"After staying talking with a brother officer for some little time, I rode on nearer the fort, and joined Sir J. Keane's staff, who were going round reconnoitring. He was just giving orders for driving in the enemy's outposts, stationed in some fruit gardens and under walls round the town. This was soon done by the Queen's 13th, and the 4th Native Infantry. Two troops of horse artillery, and a battery of foot, making in all eighteen guns, were now ordered into battery, but after firing a few rounds, and placing a shell or two, the Commanders-in-chief found, that with their small calibre, they had so little effect upon those mud walls, that he ordered them to cease firing." But he proceeds in this singular narrative:

The want of good information has now proved how serious a thing it is to take it, on military points, from a civilian. All who have passed this road, passed lightly over this place, and occasionally the "leaving behind one, battering train at Candahar." By this, the Commander-in-chief and his army are placed in a most perilous situation; for we have this morning proved how utterly useless the small caisson we have with us, are against soft mud walls like these; and our scaling ladders having been cut up to form a bridge across the Helmand, nothing now remains but to attempt the somewhat perilous attack by a *coup de main*. Engineers and Major Gordon having decided that the storming must take place on the Cabul gate, on the north-east side of the city, we wound round this evening, and took up our position on the low hills, on the extreme point of which the cut-offs built.

As my regiment forms one of the strength of the place, and as the very numerous garrison, it is likely to be desperate, we all look forward with much anxiety to the result of the conference among the heads of the army."

On the 22d of June the orders were issued for the assault—the four leading companies to be under the command of Colonel Denne, of the 13th,

The 2d, 13th, and 17th, Queen's Regiments, with the Company's Bengal Regiment, forming the storming party under General Sale. The reserve under Sir W. Cotton, composed of five regiments of Native Infantry, and the cavalry, commanded by General Thackwell, posted so as to surround the entrenchment, and cut off the retreat of the fugitives. At midnight the whole assembled, without word spoken or bugle sounded, and "though three large regiments of infantry were standing within twenty yards of us, so well was the order for silence observed, that a spectator would not have known that a man was there." The Colored said a few words to the writer's regiment, the 17th, and the column moved forward. The night was wet, dark, and windy; and, on arriving at the foot of the heights, the men were ordered to lie down, until the time for the attack, which was an hour before daylight.

At three, the batteries opened, and Capt. Hay, of the 35th Native Infantry, made a false attack on the Northern side, with his regiment, the 13th, opened our right and left, and kept up the attention of the enemy. "The excitement was now what I never before felt in my life," are the describer's words, and we can perfectly believe him. "Shot and shells were thrown in hundreds from the guns, while the tort attempted to return the fire, but its guns could not be fired above once in every three minutes, and before they had given a dozen rounds, the gate was blown open, and the leading company inside. Nothing could be more grand than the scene; the enemy hung blue lights from every part of the gateway, cheered, and sent showers of shot and arrows among us. Three hundred pounds of powder had been placed in the gateway, and at a quarter past three one great blast of light was seen, and then an awful explosion followed; and, with a cheer, the column charged, the four light companies under Denne leading, but the bold directed by Sale." By some mistake, however, the train had been fired too soon, and the troops were a few minutes off when the gate was blown open. In the mean time, the enemy had time to recover their surprise, and to throw the gateway, which was already obstructed by beams, huge stones, and dead bodies. The light companies, therefore had to fight while picking their way among the ruins; but this was soon got over, and the Afghans were driven in by the bayonet, which, in British hands, is always irresistible. The result of this gallant attack was the capture of 3500 prisoners, and 1300 horses; its further result being the sufficiently drowsy, but most unfortunate, restoration of Shah Sozib to the throne.

In a few days after, the army marched to put the Shah in possession of the city of Cabul. The valley, in which they encamped in its neighborhood was one garden—streams of the purest water meandering through gardens of the finest fruit—a man might kill himself for luxury, with peaches, plums and grapes, all equal to any house fruit in England."

The entrance of the Shah into Cabul was grand, the width varied from seventy yards to five hundred. They found the camp pitched miles within the mountains. After a night of storm and rain, they moved thirteen miles further, still in these defiles. As they advanced, the ground became more difficult, and, though it was now the middle of March, when the sun is powerful in India, they found the weather unusually cold, the snow on the hill tops, and every appearance of severity of climate. Many of the baggage animals of the officers had, by this time, died, and the public camels were perishing by fifties. At length they came to the celebrated pass of Bolan. The entrance is grand, being between two masses of rock, about five hundred feet perpendicular, without a sign of vegetation, with a small river running under the one on the right, the road being merely the shingle. The width varied from seventy yards to five hundred. They found the camp pitched miles within the mountains. 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